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THE ROLE OF THE SEMINARY LIBRARY: A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP
A JUSTIFICATION FOR UNDERSTANDING COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT AS
AN INVESTMENT, NOT AN EXPENSE

By Terry Robertson
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The mission of the Seminary Library is to encourage and facilitate study and research in all areas related to religion. It primarily reflects a commitment to the Seventh-day Adventist world church as the leading theological library in the denomination, while supporting the curriculum of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary and the research needs of the Seminary students and faculty. The Seminary Library also serves as a resource center for the wider scholarly community.¹

There is a strong tendency to view the Seminary Library only in terms of meeting the curriculum needs of the current students of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary (SDATS), in which case library acquisitions could be viewed as an expense. As an expense, good stewardship mandates reducing expenditures to the lowest defensible amount. For institutions that offer only professional degrees, such reasoning may often be the case. However, this conversation paper will attempt to make the case that the mission of the Seminary Library exceeds this limited, self-serving goal. Rather than an expense, building the Seminary Library collection is an investment. As an investment, good stewardship mandates maximum expenditure, because the greater the

¹"James White Library Resources Development Policy: Seminary Library: 1-0 Mission Statement." <http://www.andrews.edu/library/collections/policies/Seminary.pdf> (accessed 6 July 2005).

investment, the greater the returns in the future. Failure to invest adequately now will result in serious implications for the future of the Seminary.

I believe the Seminary Library also has a significant role in serving not only the SDATS and Andrews University, but also the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) world church. This role fits well into the “Legacy of Leadership” theme promoted by the current Andrews University administration.

Support for SDATS Ph.D. Programs

The SDATS is committed to serving the Seventh-day Adventist Church, not only in North America, but world wide. While theological education and pastoral training are developing outside North America, the SDATS will continue to be the flagship institution, and will lead in defining excellence, and will provide institutional mentoring to the newer seminaries. Many of the faculty of these new institutions will be graduates of SDATS.

The Role of the Ph.D. Programs in the Denomination

The leadership impact of the SDATS Ph.D. programs on the SDA denomination is globally significant in its administration, education, and ministry. Graduates serve in virtually every Division and at every level, and are training local leadership in most if not all SDA schools of higher education.

For this leadership impact to continue and grow, the degree conferred on graduates from the SDATS Ph.D. programs must continue to be recognized as a quality degree. In a sense, that piece of paper reflects a social contract with the student and the potential employers that quality education has taken place. The conferring of the degree

is how we warrant knowledgeable individuals for leadership positions in the Church. This responsibility must not be taken lightly, and the level to which we are successful in accomplishing this function with integrity depends on the value of the warrant.

The quality of any doctoral program rests on three pillars: the quality of the faculty, the quality of the students, and the quality of the library resources, not necessarily in that order. The challenges in providing quality faculty include adequate support, i.e. not overloading their teaching assignments, research time, etc., so they are able to fulfill dissertation advising in a quality and timely manner. The biggest challenge in quality of students is not recruitment, we have plenty of applications. Rather it is adequate scholarship support. This paper, however, focuses on the challenge of providing quality library resources.

An outside authority validates the degree program by accrediting the institution. The SDATS is accredited by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). As part of the accreditation evaluation, the collection and the role of the library in Seminary education is scrutinized. While there are many *subjective* elements in this evaluation of the role of the library, the most significant *objective* element is the financial support of the library, and even more specifically, the money spent on collection development. Strong support is considered a positive indicator, while weak support raises many questions and concerns which reflect on the entire program. It becomes necessary to justify weak support at length, while strong support receives immediate, unqualified approval.

Thus it is believed that a long and continuing pattern of weak collection development support will eventually impact accreditation, and that in turn, will impact

the value of the degree. This will undermine the value of the warrants of graduates, and their perceived contribution to employers. On the other hand, strengthening the warrant through strong accreditation reports will enhance the value of the degree, will strengthen the warrants of graduates, and thus will contribute to strengthening the leadership of the SDA denomination world wide.

It is understood that this warranting process is much more complicated than simply how much money is spent buying books, however, strong library support is a highly visible objective standard that bolsters all the other factors in the accreditation process.

Peer Benchmarking

Benchmarking as a strategy has been usefully employed on the Andrews University campus in many areas. This gives us information helpful in determining whether or not we are doing things right. The only caveat to using this strategy is that we must look for “best” practices. It would be tragic to base our future decision making on “worst” practices.

To gain a perspective on what the Collection Development budget should be for a doctoral degree granting member of the ATS, a table was extracted from data published by the American Theological Library Association that gives the Library Materials Expenditure for the 2003-2004 fiscal year. For the schools identified as granting academic doctoral degrees, the amount spent for materials ranged from a high of \$468,619 to a low of \$105,010 for an average of \$219,309. For that year, SDATS reported \$132,125, 24th out of the 28 schools used in the comparison. See Table I.

While there are four schools with lower expenditures reported, we would need more information before we could determine that it is a “best practice” to use them as a benchmark. For example, one of the schools offers only a single Ph.D. concentration, while SDATS offers six. A couple of the other schools are located in major metropolitan areas, and more than likely have resource sharing agreements with other local institutions. Another possibility is that the reported amount refers only to specific funds above and beyond a generous approval plan that covers much of the religious literature market. In most cases, it would seem to me that those institutions would not be appropriate benchmarks for “best practices.”

I would argue that as Seventh-day Adventists, with our unique educational philosophy and emphasis, would want to be leaders in this field, and not followers. “Best practices” that deserve our attention would involve the schools at the top of the list. While we do not need Association of Research Libraries (ARL) collections in philosophy, medieval church history, or non-Christian religions, we should compare favorably with the best theological libraries in Biblical Studies, Biblical Archaeology, Protestant Theology, American Church History, and World Christianity, among others. These “best practice” benchmarks could then allow us to document any claims of “excellence” and “leadership” using objective data.

Future Viability of the SDATS Ph.D. Programs

We can, at present, with integrity state that the Seminary Collection is excellent, and meets the needs of the SDATS Ph.D. programs. This is possible because of strong support beginning in the 1960’s through the turn of the century. However, two economic forces provide a continuing challenge to building the collection: inflation and increasing

academic publishing output. Each year, the average cost of books goes up, and there are an ever increasing number of books to choose from. So unless annual materials expenditures increase proportionately to address both issues, we are acquiring an ever decreasing proportion of the relevant academic literature.

Information technology and inter-library cooperation have done much to improve the access students have to materials not owned locally. Yet that service is not without cost. It is estimated that the average inter-library loan request costs James White Library (JWL) between \$25 and \$30. This expense is valid for materials that lie outside our collection development criteria or for older materials. Choosing to rely on inter-library loan in the future for materials well within our collection criteria and which should have been purchased now is poor stewardship. It would be better to use the \$25 to \$30 towards the purchase of the item, and have it available for future researchers. One final point, relying on inter-library loan assumes in blind faith that some other library will purchase the needed item. The odds may be reasonable that they will, but it is still a gamble.

Today's materials are tomorrow's primary sources. In any competent literature survey it would not be acceptable to skip the 2000's on simply because reduced funds for library collection meant the works were not available. Future students will need the materials from this decade as much as they will need the literature from past decades. It is our responsibility to them to ensure they will be served well.

In short, should we not adequately fund the Seminary collection in the present, at some point the decision will undermine the validity of the SDATS Ph.D. programs.

Support for the World Church

At the SDA General Conference session in July, 2005, it was noted that by 2020, at current church growth trends, 80% of members would have been in the church less than twenty years. This presents a unique challenge because the majority will not have the intellectual or social roots associated with an understanding of the Adventist story. And thus one role of the Library is as guardians of the story. The Center for Adventist Research archives materials of special interest to the denomination. And the Seminary Library makes accessible the documents that define the context. As each new wave of believers joins the church, the story must be repeated, over and over again. And the place where they will find the Story is in the Library. The more complete the collection, the greater the contribution the Library will make to the foundations that hold the church together.

Evangelism

Another theme of the SDA General Conference session stressed the importance of evangelism. I would suggest that effective evangelism requires three foundations served by a strong theological library.

Intellectual Integrity

For evangelism to be effective, the message must be as accurately presented as is humanly possible. This expectation anticipates a thorough knowledge of the Bible, a careful reflection on its interpretation, and a relevant application to the contemporary context. Given the multitude of voices appealing for the listener's ear, there is no room for shoddy work. While we must rely on the Holy Spirit to bring the results, it is equally true that it is the Holy Spirit that guides the researcher in the eternal quest for truth. The

Library can provide the resources so that thoughtful researchers can provide a solid foundation for the presentation of the truth. Thus the Library becomes a place where the Holy Spirit is truly active. A strong program of collection development in Biblical Studies and Theology is an investment in Evangelism.

Cross-Cultural Communication

Taking a single message to diverse cultures requires a special understanding and conversation about those cultures. The library is a place where we can collect the conversations in a fixed form that allows for cross-cultural dialogue.

Those who present the Word need to use the most effective language and methods to accomplish the task: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth.” (2 Tim 2:15).² By carefully following Paul’s instruction to “test all things. Hold on to what is good,” (1 Thess 5:21), thoughtful researchers open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit can provide leadership in understanding how to present the Gospel cross-culturally.

Again, the Seminary Library, as a guardian of the contemporary conversations of the community of faith, conversations reflecting wide diversity, provides a resource for thoughtful researchers to enhance the effectiveness of the evangelistic mission of the church. Well informed, understanding messengers are less likely to get in the way of the work of the Holy Spirit in reaching lives. This particular role stresses the importance of current expenditures on collection development. In an increasingly globalized, educated, literate, and secularized world, understanding how to communicate effectively and intelligently has become even more critical.

² Unless otherwise indicated all Bible references in this paper are to the *Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB)* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003).

Historical Perspective

The Seminary Library provides a resource for exploring how God has lead the evangelistic efforts of the community of faith beginning with Creation. In every age and in many cultural settings God has used willing individuals to share the salvation message.

As we reflect on where the SDA church is today, it is important to remember that we are at the end of a journey, and that we owe a tremendous debt to those who have come before us. We can trace our spiritual lineage back to Adam and Eve. At an infinite number points in the story, someone took the time to share their faith with another someone, and the community of faith grew. That experience has been repeated in each generation, and today we are part of that community because someone cared enough to write out a sermon, to copy a manuscript, to translate the Bible, to set up a printing press, to sell Bibles in a bookstore, to purchase a book for the library. Like Saul, when Jesus knocked him off his high horse, he was sent to the community of faith to be healed and receive instruction (Acts 9), so the church today finds its guidance in the collective wisdom of the community of faith of the past.

The community of faith has faithfully recorded and preserved their story in the Scripture in the form of a literary text. As the community of faith continued its journey, they reflected on these Scriptures, and applied the truth they found within their cultural context the best they new how. In turn, these seekers for truth recorded those efforts also in the form of text. This pattern has been repeated in every generation. Sometimes, the writers got it wrong, but sometimes they got it right. Thoughtful researchers today can learn from both. But the medium of preserving the message is in the form of text.

Thus an important role of the Seminary Library is to be the guardian of the texts that trace the story of God's people throughout history, from Creation to the present. This includes the collective human effort to understand and apply the story in any number of contexts. It is through carefully reflecting on this story that we find a solid mandate for evangelism, and a collective wisdom that provides guidance as we proceed evangelize to God's glory.

Scholarship and Leadership Formation

Another role the Seminary Library can play in serving the SDA world church is as a place of scholarship for working professionals not in a degree program, rather as life-long learning opportunities. It is a place where thought leaders can come, fulfill a meaningful research agenda, and thus enhance their ability to serve the Church. The discipline of scholarship not only increases the knowledge base of the researcher, but should also enhance their ability to think creatively, their analytical skills, and their ability to communicate. Thus the Library is a resource for the spiritual, intellectual, and professional development of these church leaders.

Scholarship and academic writing in its own right is a form of evangelism. Though the format and rules of discourse are different from the pulpit where the message is aimed at the hearts of listeners, academic discourse equally seeks to communicate truth to the minds of readers. Excellence in scholarship also provides opportunities for the researchers to interact in the academic community, to publish in recognized venues, and thus enhance not only their own credibility as thought leaders, but also the reputation of the institutions where they serve. And it is suggested that this visibility and credibility

will serve as a witness to SDA character and message within the larger community of faith.

The lasting benefit of sponsoring and supporting serious research is that the output, the texts, can be incorporated into the Library collection, and made accessible to future researchers, both inside and outside the SDA community, inside and outside the larger community of faith. That voice will continue to be heard “until the Lord comes.”

Conclusion

To summarize, the Seminary Library has a place in serving the SDA world church by being a guardian of the story of the community of faith; by providing the resources for growing the foundations of our faith as a support to evangelism; and by being a place where formative scholarship takes place, strengthening the leadership of the church.

Admittedly, the SDA church could rely on other libraries to provide this service to her thought leaders. This would happen if the Seminary Library collection were inadequately supported, because intelligent, motivated researchers will go where they can find the information they need. SDA thought leaders have often made use of local resources, or traveled to the libraries of non-SDA institutions to continue their research. But with strong library collection development, Andrews University could and should be the destination of choice, thus taking an active role in the development and formation of the church’s leadership. And a strong library would be one factor that makes it possible to fulfill this role over and over again.

Concluding Remarks

Two sayings of Jesus taken from the apocalyptic discourse of Matt 24-25 illustrate the duty of the librarians and administrators as stewards of the Seminary Library collection as an invaluable asset.

In the parable of the faithful servant (Matt 24:45-47), Jesus concludes, "That slave whose master finds him working when he comes will be rewarded." (vs. 46). In the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30), Jesus commends the servant who expanded the holdings entrusted to him. "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master's joy!'" (vss. 21, 23.)

In the face of a complexity of the financial challenges facing both Andrews University and the SDA denomination, it is hoped that the Seminary Library Collection will not be forgotten. It is one asset in which regular and adequate investment will result in substantial rewards for both Andrews University and the world SDA church. This "legacy of leadership" invites excellence.

TABLE I

SEMINARIES WITH ACADEMIC DOCTORATE DEGREES

LIBRARY EXPENDITURES

1	Candler School of Theology at Emory University	642	\$468,619
2	Graduate Theological Union	1322	\$401,178
3	Trinity Evangelical Divinity School of Trinity International University	814	\$373,549
4	Harvard University Divinity School	417	\$366,266
5	Southern Baptist Theological Seminary	1145	\$303,466
6	Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education	1222	\$265,815
7	Asbury Theological Seminary	1005	\$263,778
8	New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary	932	\$255,850
9	Fuller Theological Seminary	2079	\$246,754
10	Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary	866	\$241,305
11	Columbia Theological Seminary	280	\$240,559
12	Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary	459	\$228,245
13	Dallas Theological Seminary	984	\$222,263
14	Union Theological Seminary	218	\$217,487
15	Concordia Seminary (MO)	569	\$202,358
16	Boston University School of Theology	233	\$193,185
17	Luther Seminary	546	\$188,663
18	Catholic University School of Theology and Religious Studies	109	\$161,849
19	Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary	375	\$155,848
20	Westminster Theological Seminary	456	\$146,794
21	Reformed Theological Seminary	478	\$143,590
22	Illiff School of Theology	256	\$133,299
23	University of St. Michael's College Faculty of Theology	97	\$132,242
24	Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary of Andrews University	426	\$132,125
25	Brite Divinity School of Texas Christian University	212	\$123,275
26	Concordia Theological Seminary (IN)	344	\$115,836
27	General Theological Seminary	160	\$111,435
28	Claremont School of Theology	380	\$105,010
Average Library Expenditures			\$219,309

Academic doctorate degrees include the Th.D. and the Ph.D. For the Seminaries listed in this table, the Association of Theological Schools website (www.ats.edu, accessed 8 June 2005) listed these degrees. The number of students and library expenditures are taken from the *Summary of Proceedings, 2004*, 272-285.